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Ministry
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Ontario

Minister of Education
Hon. Thomas L. Wells

Curriculum Ideas for Teachers

This support document to *The Formative Years* gives practical suggestions for devising appropriate out-of-classroom experiences in the schoolyard, the neighbourhood, and farther afield for children in the Primary and Junior divisions.

Out-of-Classroom Experiences

Learning for children must begin in the immediate environment, starting with what is familiar, relevant, and of particular interest. When appropriate, the classroom should move to the schoolyard, the neighbourhood, or even farther afield.

Because of the need for first-hand experiences, the grocery store, the museum, the fire hall, or the bank of a nearby pond can temporarily become the classroom. In this way, children can observe the interaction of man with his physical and social environments and can begin to see the patterns in human activity.

It is important to preplan the rhythm of out-of-classroom experiences and make them a continuous facet of learning. Some sites require repeated visits so that changing data may be observed and recorded. The length and location of a shadow must be observed at planned intervals as must the seasonal changes in a nearby maple tree. In both cases, long-range planning is necessary for maximum learning.

When children and teacher plan together, out-of-classroom education becomes a natural extension of in-school activity. Objectives can be set and results evaluated. Planning, however, must leave room for the unexpected.

If an extremely interesting topic turns up, the teacher must be prepared to drop everything and capitalize on the opportunity of the moment. Learning starts with the children's interest and the teacher must be prepared to encourage the children to learn naturally and actively, constantly satisfying their curiosity about what they see around them.

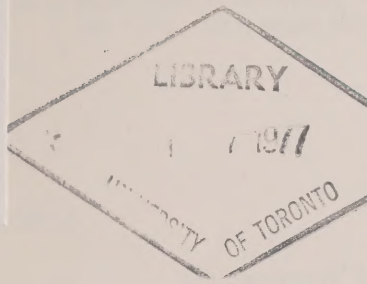


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Right at hand: the schoolyard as a classroom

Living things

The schoolyard has a number of interesting areas for investigation, both on an immediate basis and over longer periods of time. Six of these areas are discussed below. The observant teacher will find many others.

Ordinarily we think of the schoolyard as inhabited by living things only when the children and teachers are there. One of the aims of a schoolyard study might be to find living things – look for them, find a name for them, and explain how they got there. Children will likely find living things in cracks in the pavement, along fences, in flower gardens and damp places, and under debris that has blown into the yard. They will find grass, weeds, mosses, ferns, fungi, worms, spider webs, insects, and flowers in most schoolyards.

Composition

Many things are made up of a series of smaller ingredients. As an example, the sidewalk and the foundations of the school are often built of concrete; the concrete is composed of small stones or pebbles cemented together. A close examination of the swings, the teeter-totters, or the climbing apparatus will show that they are made up of parts. Children could be encouraged to take a closer look at the composition of flowers, leaves, and insects. Over a period of time, children will see that a pattern may be found in the works of man and nature if they seek it out.



Change

Although the schoolyard seems a static place, there are changes. It is different at recess and on a Sunday morning. It changes with the seasons. Other examples of change are less apparent:

- the rusting of metals and cracking in the pavement
- fading, discolouration, and peeling of paint
- repairs and patches (roof, fences, pavement)

Other changes may be taking place as an addition to the school is erected or as a group of students tidies the schoolyard. Often change can lead to a discussion of values and to the development of attitudes towards the protection and use of public property.*



* See "Environmental Studies", *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions*, chapter 6.

Prediction

It is useful to have children attempt to predict answers and then find out if they are right. Such investigations may be based on questions like these:

- Is the schoolyard level? Where are the deepest puddles? Why are they there?
- Which side of the school ground is the longest?
- Can a millipede run faster than a centipede?
- Where do the flowers grow best?

Site

Generally speaking, there is a “best place” for everything. There are reasons for the location of the furnace and of equipment on playgrounds. Children might find it interesting to find the best location for other objects, applying a problem-solving approach to questions such as these:

- The principal has told us that new swings have been ordered. Where should they be set up?
- Where should we plant the tulip bulbs?

Before looking for living things with 30 students

When the schoolyard becomes the classroom, the task of keeping track of the children can be made easier by assigning each group specific areas in the schoolyard.

Each child will observe, discuss, and select items at his or her own pace. The teacher should assign tasks that are open-ended enough to occupy the faster children, while not frustrating the slower children. The tasks should be accompanied by clear, simple instructions that are easy to follow and easy to supervise.

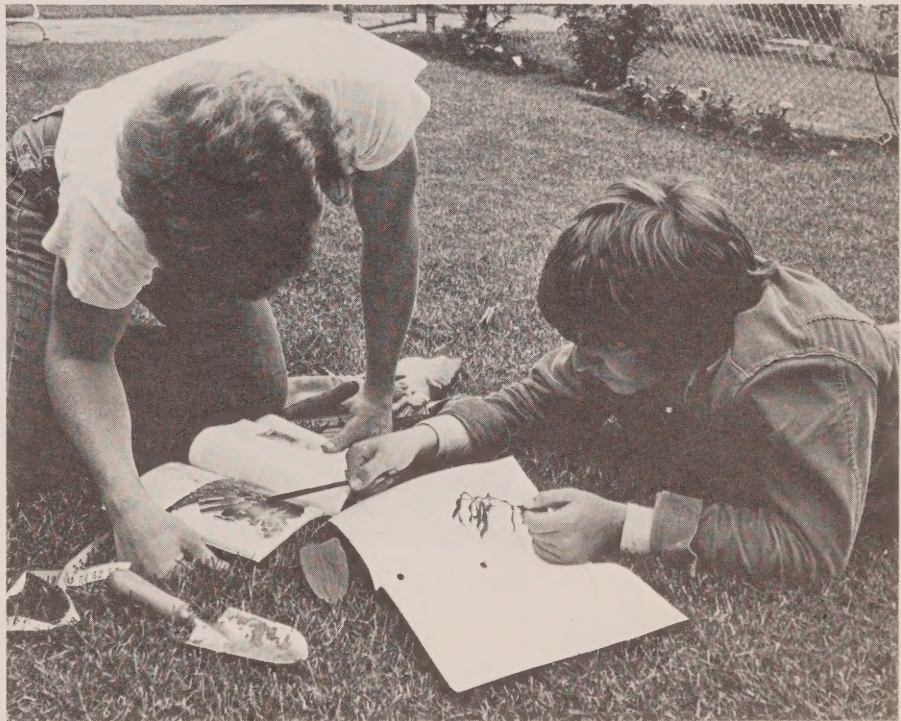
Part of any classroom activity is learning to consider others. When the schoolyard becomes an extension of the classroom, more people have to be considered. Teacher and children should discuss the behaviour appropriate for work in the schoolyard.

Sequence

In some sequences, it is important to bring out cause-and-effect relationships whenever possible. Sequences can be recorded step by step:

- rain falls on the roof – where does it go?
- a window is broken – what sequence of steps is needed to replace it?
- it is nine o'clock and the school bell rings – what happens?

Such observations do not require all children to be out in the schoolyard; small groups may be asked to observe specific phenomena and report their findings in step-by-step sequence.



Now that everybody has
a place to work

Yes, this is the best place for the swings.
What do we do next?

Once the children are busy with their assigned tasks, the teacher can move from group to group —

- helping children extend their understanding or clarify their concepts;
- noting individual differences;
- assessing the direction in which the children are moving as a group.

Each member of the group will have a specific task. It may be selected from a range of activities such as:

- sketching observations
- tape-recording sounds or descriptions
- counting, measuring,* or collecting data
- photographing events and situations.

This kind of practical problem-solving activity should have a definite application.

Children could write a letter to the principal (or maybe to the maintenance department) inviting him or her to hear the result of the class investigation. The letter could be accompanied by materials such as a mural or map showing tentative sites and a list of *pros* and *cons* for the locations chosen.

Children could also apply their learning to the classroom or to other parts of the school by working through such problems as whether the paint centre or the aquarium are located to advantage.

The playground is an integral part of the school and can be used to extend the students' experiences beyond the classroom. The schoolyard can stimulate and support investigations into *what*, *where*, *how*, and *why*.



*Note: Measuring can first be done in arbitrary units selected by the children; when the children are ready, simple metric units can be introduced.

Close by

A walk along a familiar path or road provides many opportunities for learning.

It is the first real snow of winter. It has the excitement that a definite seasonal change brings. The children are anxious to talk about snow, their new winter wear, what experiences they had, what they saw. With such restlessness in the classroom, why not bundle them up and go for a walk along a familiar path or road?

Take a listening walk.

Listening is more than hearing. It requires a sensitivity to significant sound. It requires discrimination, interpretation, and response to all sounds in the environment. A listening walk will give children a chance to develop and practise these skills.

Hearing

What are the sounds of winter? What sounds are peculiar to this season of the year? Students may be able to distinguish:

- scraping of snow shovels on pavement
- whining of tires on icy hills
- crunching of snow underfoot
- crackling of nylon ski jackets
- sloshing of rubber boots in slushy snow
- stamping of cold feet.



Soundscape

What are the many smaller sounds that make up a soundscape of the neighbourhood? Groups of children might listen for certain sounds that together give a unique soundscape:

- the loudest, the softest, most pleasant, most unpleasant
- continuous, repetitive, rhythmic, monotonous
- made by man, by nature, by machine.

Take a walk to see things for the first time.

What if . . .

Can the impressions gathered on the walk be extended?

Children find great joy in exploring, investigating and expressing their feelings about their environment, but they need to be encouraged to look, listen, taste, touch, and imagine. Opportunities to assist them to become more visually aware are limitless. Walking along a familiar road, for example, they might notice for the first time:

- things no longer visible (half the fence is gone, and so are most of the bushes and all of the grass except the tips)
- tracks of automobiles and animals, footsteps
- piles of newly shovelled snow
- caps on fence posts
- the texture of snow
- the curve of the banks left by the wind or snow blower
- the way the snow sticks to mittens
- patterns of shadow and sunlight
- formations of icicles
- wreaths of smoke from chimneys
- their own breath
- angels in the snow
- the way white things seem to blend and become indiscernible.

Imagination can run riot on a walk.

Clouds look like rabbits and dogs; icicles look like dragon's teeth; perhaps the fence post is really wearing a toque.

When the unexpected happens, previous plans must be set aside. How far aside will depend on the interest shown by the children. Perhaps a bulldozer is clearing a lot, a garbage truck is collecting trash, or a fire truck is parked by the curb while the crew inspects houses.

The children may want to talk about the fire truck, its uses, parts, or about experiences they have had with fire trucks, firemen, and fires. Teachers should listen to the discussion. What interests the children about the fire truck can have implications for future classroom activities.

Once the children have discussed and explored the fire truck at random, the teacher should bring them around to discussing the sounds associated with a fire (siren, bell, gushing of water through hose, axe chopping). In the classroom the fire truck may still hold more interest for some children than sounds of winter. Teachers must be prepared to accept this kind of change and plan the rest of their program accordingly.

Good story books about snowy days can extend visual impressions into word pictures. Illustrations will show how others see a snowy day. After they have been read aloud, the books can be left at the reading table for private perusal.

Poetry on subjects related to snow can also be read aloud.

Good commercial photographs of winter sights will help recall and extend the experiences.

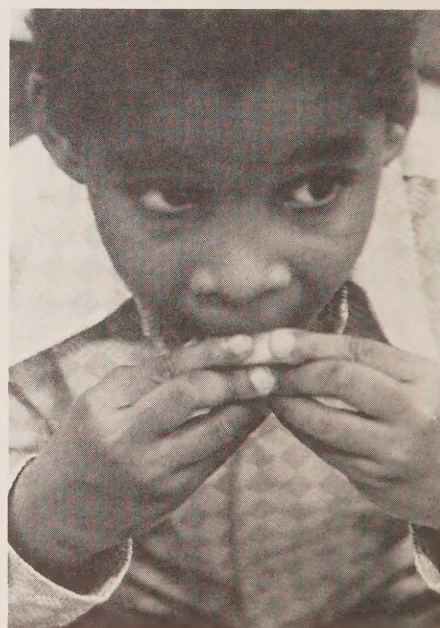
Childrens' paintings and drawings are their way of recording what they saw. Paints, paper, and crayons should be ready for recording impressions.

The visual can be translated into movement through dance and drama.

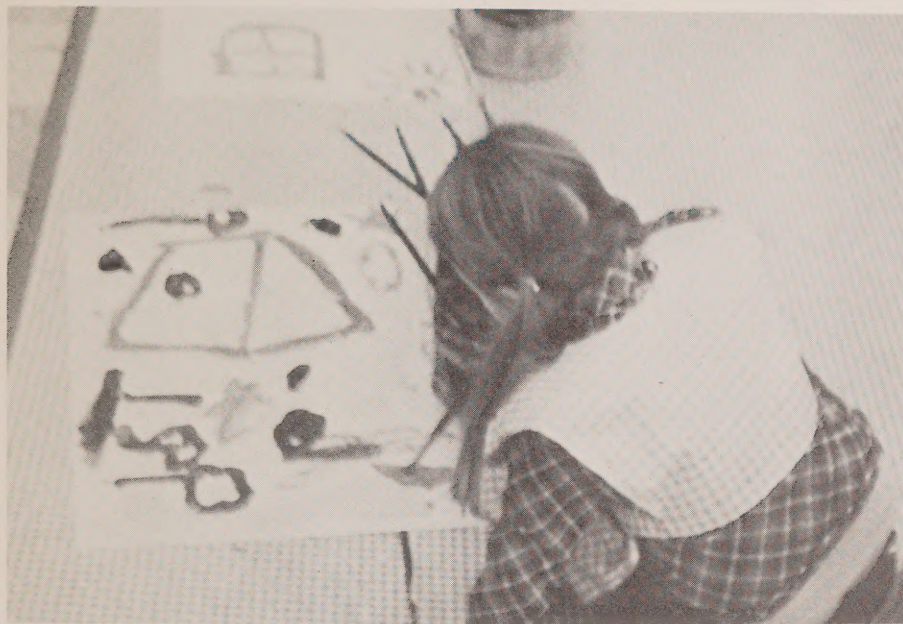
A small group of children can work together to write a story about what they have seen.

All these activities may focus on either the original plans for the expedition or on the unexpected event. Some or all of the children might want to follow up on the fire truck or the garbage truck they have seen.

Children must experience the world around them if they are to communicate the sense of form, significance, and pleasure they derive from it. Out-of-classroom activities provide some of these experiences.



Out and beyond: We visit a nearby supermarket.



Within walking distance of most schools are service stations, libraries, grocery stores, or fire halls. These locations have at least two things in common: they are facilities

upon which the community depends – both children and adults – and they are places where a number of people work together.



The rules we make

Young children learn to follow rules before they can fully understand how or by whom they were made. A visit to a store will give children opportunities to notice that:

rules help people to work together

There are a number of examples in the store that might be discussed prior to the visit:

- most stores have regular opening and closing hours;
- all workers have both rights and responsibilities.

rules help to protect customers

Children, through their own experiences, may be familiar with some of the following:

- personal cleanliness is important for food handlers;
- accurate weights and measures must be maintained;
- some dairy and bakery products are dated;
- there are entry doors and exit doors.

rules vary with circumstances

Rules vary according to circumstances and location. Different modes of behaviour are expected in a church, in a library, in a sports arena, and in a store.

What if Billie gets sick ???

How should people treat people?

In many ways, the things that can make the world a better place cannot be legislated. Only through personal experiences and observations over a period of time can courtesy, empathy, co-operation, loyalty, and responsibility become second nature to the child. The following questions may provide a basis for role-playing and decision-making that promote these characteristics.

The worker in the store

If you were a clerk in a store, what would you do:

- if someone bumped into a display and scattered canned goods all over the aisle?
- if a lady returned a quart of milk saying that it was sour and she wanted her money back?
- if you were packing bags and someone wanted you to take their groceries out in rainy weather?

The customer in the store

What should you do:

- with the shopping cart after you have put the groceries into the car?
- if you drop a jar of jam and break it?
- if your small brother begins to cry because mother will not buy the breakfast cereal he wants?

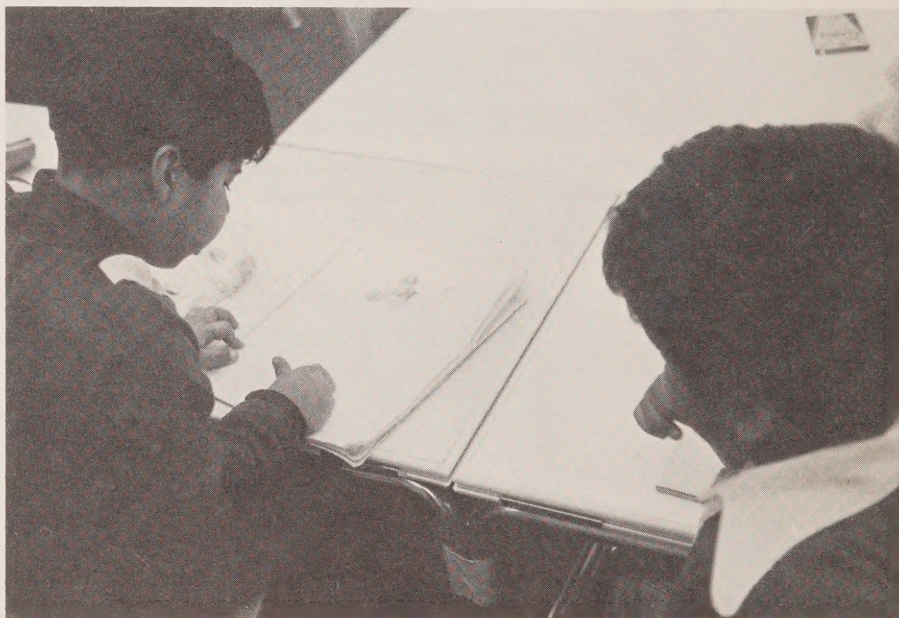
There are practical aspects to be considered when leaving the classroom, whether to go down the street or across town.

Why not carry a few paper bags – they help if Billie gets sick.

If one of the children is a handicapped child, perhaps an older child, parent volunteer, or classroom mother can be asked to give extra help.

Teachers should check the facilities available. A visit to the washroom before leaving school may be a helpful precaution.

Keeping track of 30 children can be made easier by setting up a buddy system, using parent volunteers, or enlisting the aid of senior students.



Was the trip worthwhile?

Children can assess their own progress by asking themselves some simple questions: *What did I find out on this trip? Did I like anything about myself on this trip? What did I enjoy on the trip?* Their responses could be recorded in their personal booklets. Not all questions would be used after every trip nor would all children want to evaluate themselves after every excursion. The teacher must work with the children, looking over their books and discussing entries with individuals.

In small group sessions, peer group evaluation of participation or social skills can be encouraged. During such sessions the teachers must ensure that the evaluations are fair and constructive, and that they offer a chance for honest dialogue.

Teachers are constantly assessing the effectiveness of an activity through observation of their children. To make these observations more systematic and accurate they might:

- develop some simple technique for on-the-spot recording of significant events and observations;
- choose two or three children for close observation on each trip.

The world outside the classroom provides a rich area for exploration and development of attitudes, skills, and concepts. Teachers should ask themselves whether they could make more use of it.